

Inscriptions

– contemporary thinking on art,
philosophy and psycho-analysis –
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Correspondence: *Inscriptions*, e:
inscriptions@tankebanen.no.

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On January 6 news media around the world showed images from America that evoked art historical scenes: a scattered mob of hooligans armed with home-made weapons, a semi-nude male with facial paint and a fur-hat, married couples, unshaven youngsters carrying the Confederate flag, all roaming the interior of Washington D.C.'s Capitol building complex, the home of USA's most senior democratic institutions, its Congress and Senate. How could we not be reminded of artful renditions of a similar storming, some 1500 years ago, when the barbarians sacked Rome's Capitol, the original, in an event that came to signify the classical age's conclusion and the beginning of what we today refer to as the Middle Ages.

We will not have to doubt that the event unsettled many people, not least in America. Leading voices refer to the event as an attempted coup d'état, terrorism, even, but is the mere fact that many ordinary folks were frightened sufficient to refer to this, in the words of Francis Fukuyama, "disorganised rebellion" as an act of organised terror? We think not, and when leading politicians refer to the event as a moment constituting a "clear and present danger" we agree, but the cause of this danger is, in our view, quite different and far more profound.

As Fukuyama has noted, what we have is an increasing discontinuity between two parallel information societies. While, on the one hand, we have an alliance between an outgoing president and a popular movement, convinced of a "stolen election," that relies on a constitutional right to carry arms in defence against tyrannical governance, on the other, we have the vast majority of mass media, state apparatuses, institutions of gover-

nance and education, and so forth, all seeking to *contain* this alliance and their agenda, and the means by which they do so is increasingly by mobilisation the military arm of the state. As this issue of *Inscriptions* is published images from Washington are widely circulated by international news media in which armed forces have barricaded the Capitol building, so as to avert any further storming of the sanctum of Western Democracy.

Have not the insurgents then achieved at least parts of the goal, namely to expose the weakness of the prevailing system of governance? While an affirmative answer to this question would support the "terror" thesis, we believe that it is more pertinent to perceive the present build-up of arms as an inescapable logic of the unfolding of events in themselves; what we have is an arms race in reprise, an almost farcical replay of the Cold War's insane binary threat on a domestic front. In other words, what we have is the unfolding of what Wolfgang Schirmacher referred to as the "metaphysical technique."

As each side brings to further perfection its ability to utilise certain technologies, be they social media platforms, domestic technological surveillance, rhetorical techniques, the other hurries to outflank the other in yet another technological leap. What the sides share is a view of technology as a craft, as means that are available to satisfy certain unquestionable ends. The result of this technological arms-race is, in Schirmacher's words, "a violent, narrow-minded survival technique" that safeguards itself by denying our most intimate technological world: the human being born as technician, as the being that can breathe and perceive.

This issue of *Inscriptions* seeks to gather together Schirmacher's thinking about technology with questions of art and the good life. When Schirmacher juxtaposes metaphysical technique to "truth technique" is incites us to ask how can we live truthfully, and how can we live well with these insights? Frederik-Emil Friis Jakobsen shows how ethics, or the practice of justice, already to Plato and Socrates was properly a domain of *technē*, rendering ethics and artifice intimately connected. What we find in Gorgias and *The Republic* isn't so much an argument for a particular moral stance, as it is an account of an inherent technicity of ethics.

Alessandra Mularoni reconfigures psychoanalysis for a time when cognition is dissipated by our networked technology, thus allowing notions of consciousness to spill over onto non-human objects and systems. Upgrading and updating Sherry Turkle's ideas for psychoanalysis in computer culture, Mularoni demonstrates how a Freud's notion of melancholia can begin to make sense in the context of a machinic psyche. Similarly, Susan

Cannon and Maureen A. Flint acknowledge that our contemporary technological context poses particular sets of challenges that can be confronted with careful analysis and artful living. In a commentary on academic life in the networked society, Cannon and Flint reconsider the academic rituals and platforms in which their careers are embedded, asking whether there are other, alternative poles of valorisation that can aid in defamiliarisation from their present condition, and usher into another, good life.

Giorgio Agamben asked how our technological age and the discipline of medical science have shaped our ability and potentiality of care in two short texts published in the previous issue of *Inscriptions* (vol. 3, no. 2). In this issue, Simon Smith responds by showing that, while Agamben's description of the reality of the present pandemic turned out not to correspond to reality, his fears are nevertheless well founded, and particularly his concerns that the pandemic and the scientific context in which it is embedded reinforce what Smith calls "a disastrous individualism."

In this issue Philippe Stamenkovic reviews Andreas Malm's recent *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: war communism in the twenty-first century* to ask not only whether a comparison between the present pandemic and rapid climate change can be fruitfully made, but also whether "communism" is a productive sign under which to assemble thinking with and against such calamitous events. In his book *This Life: secular faith and spiritual freedom*, Martin Hägglund suggests to organise social and political commitments under the sign of secularism, thus suggesting a way to articulate critique of metaphysics in the traditional, ontological sense, with the sense in which it was employed by Martin Heidegger, as a way for our sweeping technological epoch to gather everything within itself and to pose all things as resources, as *standing reserves* in a constellation in which we reduce ourselves and everything in our world to instruments.

In our Arts section, our guest curator Marjorie Vecchio enlists three artistic constellations to interrogate how we can become less deadly and more able to practice the arts of living and dying well on a damaged planet. Drawing a vast canvas that includes the geometry of Euclid, techno-utopia allegories, absurdist fantasies and bogus documentaries, Vecchio and her artists, Grace Weir, Surabhi Saraf, and Nicholas Kahn and Richard Selesnick, show how, beyond the strict philosophical domain, we are abandoned to a creativity that we cannot imagine, but towards which we must nevertheless relentlessly stumble.

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